

John Deere Helping Illinois

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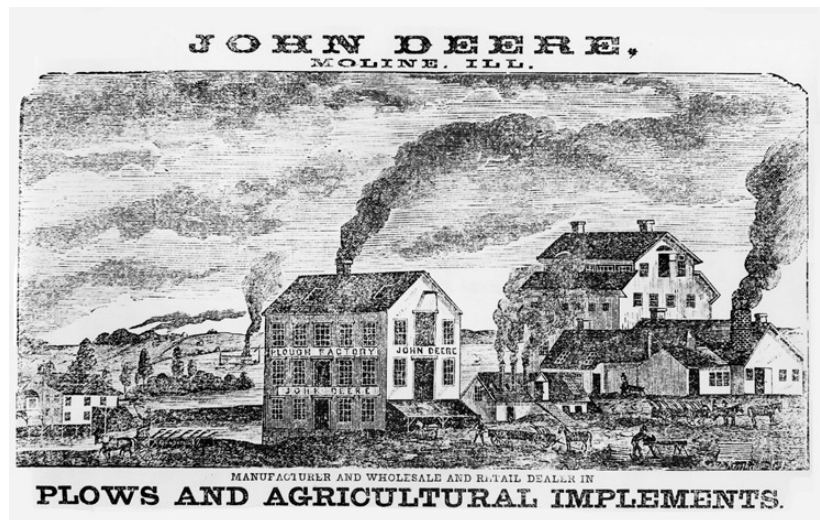
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It took a strong man and a team of oxen ninety-six hours to plow one acre of land in the nineteenth century, but John Deere developed a new plow that sped up the plowing process and is still affecting the lives of people in Illinois. John Deere was a hardworking man. Deere developed the plow that turned into a farm-equipment establishment of today. His works benefit people worldwide, but also the area in which I live.

Deere was born on February 7, 1804 in Rutland, Vermont. He became an apprentice to a blacksmith at the age of seventeen. His apprenticeship ended in 1825. He immediately became a blacksmith and opened a shop in Vermont. He went bankrupt because there were too many blacksmiths in his area. He sold his shop to his father-in-law and moved to Grand Detour, Illinois. He arrived with his tools and seventy-five dollars. While in Illinois he soon learned that the people, much like the people in Vermont, had problems plowing fields. In Illinois the sticky soil made the problem greater. To plow well in Illinois, farmers had to use eight yoke of oxen. This was very expensive and the farmers of the area could not afford these oxen. Deere set out to develop a faster and more effective way to plow.

Deere visited the sawmill of Leonard Andru and saw a broken saw blade. Deere took the blade and chiseled off the teeth, heated, then shaped the blade to the proper shape. The blade, from its use at the mill, had a very smooth, slick polished surface. This kept the sticky soil from clinging on the blade. Deere finished his first plow in 1837. This plow was more effective than the other modern plows. Deere made two more plows in 1838, which he gave to friends in the Grand Detour area. Deere made ten plows in 1839, which he sold for ten to twelve dollars. In 1840 he made forty plows, in 1841 seventy-five, in 1842 one hundred, and in 1843 he made four hundred plows.



Photograph Courtesy of the Illinois State Historical Library

Deere decided that Grand Detour was not the right place for a large business because he would not be able to transport the plows to other places. Deere packed up and moved to Moline, Illinois, which is located on the Mississippi River where he could make plows for wide distribution. In Moline, sales continued to rise. He sold seven hundred and twelve hundred were on back order. Deere began to invest in new machines that allowed him to make more and more plows. In one year he was able to make 2,136 plows.

John Deere and Company was able to change with the times. The company designed and developed many new machines that continued to speed up and enhance the farming processes. All of the work that John Deere and his company did has helped Illinois greatly. In the 1990s the state's 76,000 farms helped to make more than nine billion dollars. On these farms there are 120,000 people who can say that their jobs are affected by the John Deere company in some way. The Deere company itself has more than 37,000 employees and 7,300 of them work in Illinois. There are also eighty-two dealers in Illinois. According to the John Deere company, in 1997 they made more than \$440,800,000, much of which was put back into Illinois' economy. [From Hiram Drache, "The Impact of John Deere's Plow", Illinois History Teacher (2001); Curtis Linke, "John Deere", Farm World, Jan. 1, 1980; Katie Thompson, "John Deere pioneers the prairie plow", He gave the steel plow to the world, http://www.field-reporter.com/The_Green_Girl/gg-11-20-00.htm, (Sept. 20, 2003).]